

Language contact in the Volga-Kama Area*

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0. Introduction

The investigation of the ethnogenetic and linguistic processes of the peoples and languages of the Volga-Kama Region has a history of over 150 years. It is a geographical area where different Finno-Ugric and Turkic languages and some other languages of unknown origin lived within the borders of actual states (the Volga Bulgarian Empire, the Golden Horde, the Kazan Khanate) and established different types of linguistic contact. From a turcological point of view this area is important in the sense that the only language (Chuvash) which has survived from the r-Turkic branch of the Turkic family and the knowledge of which has a decisive role in the reconstruction of the Turkic Protolanguage was formed here. The common feature of all the languages in the area is that – with the exception of the Volga Bulgarian language, having its own inscriptions in Arabic script – they have no early written documents or external ones which could serve as sources for the reconstruction of their linguistic and ethnic history. Therefore the remnants of the characteristic features of the languages participating in the contact are only partially preserved. The lack of written records is the reason why ethnolinguistic change is investigated by linguistics, archeology and history alike.

The Middle Volga Region as a specific ethnolinguistic unity was first determined by Soviet archeologists and historians in the middle of the 20th century (cf. Gening–Khalikov 1964, Khalikov 1969) on the ground of the political supremacy. In the meantime it was modified by linguists and also historians (cf. Serebrennikov 1972, Róna-Tas 1982a, Bereczki 1983, Róna-Tas 1988: 766–780, Khalikov 1991, Klima 1996, Agyagási 1999a, Bereczki 2005a, 2007, Ivanov 2009/1: 30–32). According to the generally accepted view four periods of its history can be determined: the Pre-Bulgarian period, the Pre-Mongolian (or Bulgarian) age, the Golden Horde and the Kazan Khanate. The first period is described as one of interactions and assimilation processes between the different autochthonous people of Finno-Ugric origin which did not have an organized state, were given different ethnonyms and have been identified only through archeologic findings. The second period is characterized as the period of contacts between the dominant Volga Bulgarian and non-dominant Finno-Ugric population, where the dominant population mediated the elements of its own culture and religion by means of the language. Thus, this period is the time when Volga-Bulgarian words were borrowed by the neighbouring languages. The third period covers the resettlement of the Volga-Kama area after the Mongolian invasion, the appearance of the Kipchak-Turkic population in the area and the time when of new contact zones were established between newcomers and local ethnic

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groups. Finally, according to this view, the fourth period is the time of the consolidation of the Kazan Tatar state and its turning into the dominant power of the region, when elements of the Kazan Tatar dialects affected the languages of the area. (It is to be noted that several nationalistic Tatar scholars like M. Z. Zakiev and Ya. F. Kuzmin-Yumanadi do not share this view. They consider Tatars direct descendants of the Volga-Bulgars without any real scientific foundation. For more details see Agyagási 2005a: 17–23).

Such an interpretation of ethnic and language contacts in the multilingual Middle Volga-Region can be compared to the model of cultural anthropology developed by Uriel Weinreich (1953). According to Weinreich, in the relation of two contacting languages (as in the case of contacting cultures) the less prestigious language (in our context the non-dominant language) is influenced generally by the more prestigious, i.e. the dominant one. When unfolding, such language contacts are generally unidirectional and irreversible.

The first attempt to describe the actual connections between the Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages of the Volga-Kama Region in their integrity was Gábor Berczki's comprehensive study published in 1983 and entitled „Areal contacts of the languages of the Volga-Kama Region”. In the introduction Berczki surveys the major phases in the ethnogenesis of the Middle Volga-Kama Region before it was absorbed by the Russian Empire, then he gives a detailed description of the location and chronology of the Bolgar-Turkic-Finno-Ugric and Tatar-Finno-Ugric language contacts. It is followed by the analysis of the linguistic phenomena as represented by different levels (lexicology, phonetics, morphology and syntax) which are interpreted by Berczki as the result of the Turkic cultural impact on the Finno-Ugric languages of the region (see also Berczki 1984, 1993). He treats areal linguistic phenomena as changes that are capable of crossing the borders of the source language, modifying the internal structure of the neighbouring languages at different linguistic levels and resulting in linguistic interference. In 2007 Berczki published a new study about the Volga-Kama linguistic area, in which he did not change the theoretical approach to this question but extended the circle of the linguistic phenomena discussed and revised several of his previous statements.

As is well-known, the concept and mechanism of the mechanism of a linguistic area was first introduced and described by Roman Jakobson, who took one single linguistic change, the palatalization of consonants, to characterize the Eurasian linguistic area (Sprachbund). This process started from Slavic and spread across its borders, reaching the line of non-related languages (cf. Jakobson 1971). Since Jakobson's study, this kind of research has resulted in the discovery of numerous linguistic areas in different geographical regions and a huge amount of data has been accumulated, which shows that the different linguistic areas are organized on the basis of different principles characterized by different peculiarities. These documentations also made possible the typology of the different linguistic areas from the 1980's. From these I would like to call attention to three types only, which are able to contribute to the more shaded description of system of the known linguistic contacts.

S. Thomason and T. Kaufman (1988: 46–57) distinguish two basic functional scenarios of linguistic areas depending on how the languages sharing a common area interact. Areas in which the borrowing of different linguistic elements plays the dominant role

belong to the first type (*maintenance and borrowing scenario*). In this group borrowing can affect the lexicon as well as the phonological and syntactical levels. Those linguistic areas which do not show any linguistic interference but have undergone a language shift among the areal languages fall into the second group. This is called *shift and transfer scenario* (cf. Thomason–Kaufman 1988: 50, Table 3).

L. Campbell (1998) classifies linguistic areas according to their formation. He describes two types, circunstantial and historical. In the circunstantial type, it is only the sheer existence and the number of converging elements that can be established, while in the historical one the history of language contacts can be reconstructed, thus the genesis of the specific area can also be explored. P. Muysken (2000) divides linguistic areas into four types. In the first type, each member of the area shows the effect of an extinct dominant language. In the second type, each language of the area shows the effect of another co-existent dominant language. In the third type, any language of the area can be perceived as the second language of a population speaking earlier an extinct, non-dominant language of the area. Finally, in the fourth type any language of the area can serve as the second language of a community speaking a live, non-dominant language of the area.

Below I will discuss the contact-induced phenomena of the Volga-Kama linguistic area in its full complexity and follow the historical periodization I have already presented at the beginning of my lecture. Then I will make an attempt to add corrections to the typology of the Volga-Kama linguistic area. However, before doing that I find it necessary to speak about the methodological background which has allowed me to investigate language contacts. The authors examining the borrowing of lexical and grammatical elements and units of word formation in this linguistic area have generally used the historical comparative method. The appearance of the structural peculiarities in the neighbouring languages induced by the prototypical language of the area cannot be analysed with this technique. The most adequate method for the research of such phenomena is the code-copying framework developed by Lars Johanson in 1992.

1. Language contacts in the Pre-Bulgarian period

Regarding language contacts, the Pre-Bulgarian period cannot be fully explored. This is because prior to the written historical sources of this period (10th century A.D.) we have some archeological information about migrations of ethnic groups, mainly descendants from the Common Finnic branch of the Finno-Ugric family. However, the exact identification of the archeological cultures with concrete languages is only hypothetic, if possible at all. The main conclusion that can be drawn from historical, archeological and linguistic investigations of the past fifty years is that the reconstruction of the ethnic and linguistic genealogy of the people of the Middle Volga Region shows significant differences. Therefore in my paper I will only mention ethno-linguistic processes that are connected to specified ethnic groups and which resulted in provable linguistic consequences.

The written sources deriving from the time prior to the foundation of the Volga-Bulgarian state around the confluence of the Volga and the Oka rivers refer to historical

Cheremis people together with Meria, Muroma and Mordva ethnic and linguistic populations. From these only the Mordvinians have survived. Archeological sources prove that these peoples, including the historical, Cheremis were locally absorbed by the expanding Russians, having been ethnically and linguistically assimilated into them by the middle of the 12th century. Their assimilation could also have taken place north of the Onega and Beloozero region after they had settled down there. Further to the east in the Volga-Kama Region and east of the the Kama-Vyatka junction there existed a Proto-Permian ethnicity. Its name was not preserved by the early written sources but its one-time presence, subsequent dissolution and the continuity of its southern wing has been confirmed by archeological, ethnographical and linguistic evidence. There were also Ancient Mari people living in the neighbourhood, who are now seen as the ancestors of the modern Mari from an ethnic as well as linguistic point of view. Research has shown that the Ancient Mari ethnic group was not identical with the historical Cheremis of the written sources (for more details cf. Agyagási 1999a, 2002a). Their own ethnonym (Mari) is not mentioned by the early written sources but their existence near the Ancient Permian settlements is indicated by their language contacts with the Ancient Permian people. There were 41 words borrowed from the Proto-Permian language into Proto-Mari and after the dissolution of the Proto-Permian unity another 30 words came to Proto-Mari from the Proto-Votyak language (Bereczki 1977, 2005b, see also Galkin 2001).

Summing up we can conclude that according to the present state of research two types of language contacts existed in the Pre-Bulgarian period in the Middle Volga Region (cf. Table 1). In the first type the opposition of dominant and non-dominant language types prevailed, so in the case of Meria, Muroma and historical Cheremis, a linguistic language-shift happened under the influence of the Old Russian language (for more details cf. Leont'ev 1996, Makarov 1997). The second type is represented by the contact of two languages of Finno-Ugric origin, where lexical borrowing from Proto-Permian into Proto-Mari was common. Lexical borrowing between the two languages in the opposite direction has not been pointed out.

2. Language contacts in the Bulgarian period

The Pre-Mongolian or Bulgarian period began with the migration of the Bulgarian and other Turkic tribes, with accompanying ethnic groups such as the Ancient Hungarians, south to the Volga-Kama Region in several waves and ended when their imperial centre was burned down by the Mongols in 1236. After the Volga-Bulgarian state had been founded Islam had appeared in this region, not only the participants but also the character and intensity of language contacts changed. The Bulgarian tribes settled down in several groups in the region, later forming the geographical basis for the Volga-Bulgarian dialects (for details cf. Agyagási 2007). It should be noted that since it was only Chuvash that survived from the Volga-Bulgarian dialects as a living language, in earlier literature all Volga-Bulgarian linguistic phenomena were referred to as Chuvash.

2.1. Volga Bulgarian–Proto-Permian contacts

The Proto-Permian–Volga-Bulgarian language contacts started before the dissolution of the Proto-Permian unity. Their result can be observed at several linguistic levels. Lexical borrowing was a mutual process: a) 20 words of Bulgar-Turkic origin were borrowed from Volga-Bulgarian into Proto-Permian and Votyak (Wichmann 1903, Rédei–Róna-Tas 1972, Róna-Tas 1988: 760–766), b) 22 words of Finno-Ugric origin were borrowed from Proto-Permian and Votyak into Volga Bulgarian (Fedotov 1965b, 1968, Rédei–Róna-Tas 1980, 1982).

Apart from the above, levels other than lexical were also subject to borrowing from Volga Bulgarian into Proto-Permian and Votyak (i.e., Volga Bulgarian phonetic, morphological and syntactic features were borrowed, cf. Bereczki 1983). These latter changes can be qualified as one of the possible conditions for the definition of this region as a linguistic area.

2.2. Volga Bulgarian–Mordvin contacts

In this period the Volga Bulgarians also had contacts with the Mordvin dialects in this region but as a result of these language contacts only four Volga-Bulgarian words borrowed directly into Mordvin can be identified. Lexical borrowings in the opposite direction have not been detected (Paasonen 1897, Róna-Tas 1988: 766–767).

2.3 A specific type of language contact in the Volga-Region

Finally, a specific type of language contact occurred in this period, in the course of which the native speakers of the contacting languages were not living in close proximity to each other.

On the one hand, several Arabian and Persian words found their way into the Volga Bulgarian vocabulary after the Volga Bulgarian elite had been converted to Islam, despite the fact that the Volga-Bulgarian had no direct contact either with Arabic or New Persian (cf. Scherner 1977, Agyagási 1982: 11). On the other hand, due to the role of Volga Bulgarians in the trade relation between East and West, they got in touch with the Eastern Slavic tribes in the 9th century. In the course of language contacts words were borrowed from Volga Bulgarian to East Slavic (cf. Dobrodomov 1974, 1985, Róna-Tas 1982: 152, 156–58, Agyagási 2010) and also from East Slavic into the Volga Bulgarian dialects (cf. Jegorov 1954, Agyagási 1992, 2005a). Some words of Arabian, Persian and East Slavic origin were transmitted by Volga Bulgarian to the Proto-Permian language. The specific features of the language contacts mentioned above refer to the growing dominance of the Volga-Bulgarian language in the region, which was suddenly interrupted by the Mongolian invasion against the Volga Bulgarian empire in 1236. From this year on a totally new period of language contact began in the Middle Volga Region.

3. Language contacts in the period of the Golden Horde

The Mongolian invasion resulted in a radical change in the ethnic structure of the Middle-Volga Region. Two new ethnic groups arrived in this region: a Mongolian-speaking military regency accompanied by an increasing number of Kipchak-Turks. At about the same time, smaller ethnic groups (for example the Volga Hungarian fragments) dispersed (cf. Róna-Tas 1986, 1996: 230–237), lost their own language and assimilated ethnically into the bigger ethnic groups surrounding them. Other ethnic groups resident in this area escaped from their original homelands and migrated to other areas thought to be more secure. The political and linguistic dominance of the Volga Bulgarians was suddenly disrupted.

After the most devastating invasion of the Mongols the surviving part of the Volga Bulgarian elite capitulated to the Mongols and the Kipchaks accompanying the Mongols. This quickly led to the assimilation of the Volga Bulgarian elite into the Kipchaks. This process however, was not completed without linguistic consequences. The assimilation of the Volga Bulgarians caused the so-called substratum effect, which means in this case that after the language shift of the Volga-Bulgarians the pronunciation of Kipchak words took on some Volga Bulgarian phonetic nature in their language (Róna-Tas 1976, Agyagási 1996, 1997a 2002c, 2005b).

Other Volga-Bulgarian dialectal groups as well as the neighbouring Ancient Mari population fled to the banks of the Volga River between the Vetluga and Vyatka and some of them settled down there and mixed with each other. Their status in their new dwelling place could not have been very different from each other because obviously both ethnic groups were newcomers, however, they preserved great cultural differences. The Volga Bulgarian-Mari language contacts must have begun after their migration in the middle of the 13th century (Bereczki 1994: 14–16).

With different Volga Bulgarian dialects being involved, this system of language contacts was quite complex. The different contact-induced changes affected different levels of both languages mutually. There was active contact between Volga Bulgarian and Mari in the Middle and Modern Turkic period, so referring to linguistic phenomena I will apply this relative chronology of linguistic history in what follows below.

Among the Volga-Bulgarian contact-induced changes we can differentiate between lexical borrowings – loan words (cf. Lukojanov 1974, Fedotov 1990, Bereczki 1968, 1983, Fedotov 1968, 1990, Agyagási 1983, 1994a, 1994b, 2009) and calques (Bereczki 1983, 2005a, 2006) which entered the Mari language in the middle of the 13th c. The number of Volga-Bulgarian loan words in the Mari language approaches 2000 (Räsänen 1920, 1946). The majority of these are words of Turkic origin but some lexical items of Arabian, Persian and Old Russian origin were also transmitted from Volga Bulgarian dialects to Mari (Isanbaev 1989). The investigation of calques patterned on Volga Bulgarian has already started but new results are to be obtained in the future in this field. It should also be mentioned that the influx of Volga-Bulgarian and Chuvash loan words into Mari continued even after the Golden Horde period, however its periodization is still in progress.

There was also a third participant involved in language contacts between Volga-

Bulgarian and Mari. This ethnic group can be identified as Lower-Cheremis (Cheremisa nizhnaja) on the basis of a later source (Kazanskaja istorija, see Adrianova-Perets' edition of 1954) 1532–1552. This ethnic group settled down near the Kama-Vjatka confluence and entered into contact with Mari and Chuvash people after the Mongolian invasion. As a result, both Mari (Lukojanov 1974, Fedotov 1990) and Chuvash contain the same 60 words from this language of unknown origin (Agyagási 2000, 2001). Phonetic influence of substratum origin on the Viryal dialect of Chuvash is observed and described by Jemeljanova (2002).

The other result of contact-induced changes between Volga Bulgarian and Mari was the borrowing of non-lexical linguistic features, a two-way process. Morphological tools and syntactic structures: case endings, markers, the morphological formation of the comparative of adjectives, analytic verb forms of the past tenses, different types of participle and gerund structures were copied from Volga-Bulgarian into Mari (Beke 1914–1915, Serebrennikov 1960, Agyagási 1999b, 2001b, Bereczki 2002). In parallel with it, from the beginning of the Early Middle Turkic period bisyllabic Mari word structures affected Volga-Bulgarian bisyllabic words with vowels of upper tongue position. This influence led to the appearance of the reduced vowel quality in the Middle Chuvash vowel system. It means that the Middle Chuvash language simply copied the phonetic realization of Mari close vowels in second syllables. Towards the end of the Early Middle Turkic period the rounded and unrounded upper vowels Chuvash became reduced not only in second syllables but also in all other phonetic positions, so they became phonemes in the Early Middle Chuvash vowel system (cf. Agyagási 1997b, 1998). It can be observed that in one neighbouring subdialect of the Mountain Mari dialect the rounded reduced vowels of the new Chuvash type emerged as the final step of non-lexical interactions of this period (Agyagási 2002b).

The main participants of the Golden Horde period in the Middle-Volga Region were the Mongols. They spoke a kind of Middle Mongolian language. From Middle Mongolian several words were borrowed directly by the Middle Chuvash language, however, the Mongolian lexical influence affected the Kipchak Turkic dialects first of all (Róna-Tas 1982c). Even more Middle Mongolian words spread to the languages of the Volga-Kama Region through Kipchak and Volga Bulgarian mediation (Róna-Tas 1974). The investigation of non-lexical borrowings from Middle Mongolian into the languages of the area is in progress.

This period can also be characterised as the time of settlement of Kipchak groups in the Volga-Kama area. By this early period the Kipchaks had not reached the status of a dominant language. Their dialects were just being formed, and they were beginning to establish language contacts with all the inhabitants of the region, including the Mordvins, the Chuvash, the Mari, and the Votyak (Paasonen 1897, Poppe 1927, Räsänen 1923, Berta 1983, Berta 1984, Róna-Tas 1988, Csúcs 1990, Dmitrieva 2000: 100–105, Agyagási 2004a). With the appearance of new Kipchak colonies next to the territories of the other peoples of the region, 2 types of vocalic systems came to be opposed to each other: one with reduced vowels (Votyak, Mari and Chuvash), the other (the Kipchak dialects) without them. From the end of this period vowel reduction as a non-lexical influence started to affect the Kipchak languages and it resulted in the appearance of vowel reduction in Kipchak before the next period of its development (Róna-Tas 1975).

The direct interaction between Russian and Kipchak dialects also started. The borrowing of lexical elements of Slavic origin by Kipchaks, and, in the reverse order (from different Kipchak dialects to Russian) began at about this time (Teregulova 1957, Akhunzianov 1968, Berta 1983, Agyagási 2005a). Of the Finno-Ugric languages of the area, Mordvin dialects contacted South Russian (Stipa 1947, Bubrix 1947), while Mari and Votyak came close to North Russian dialects (Savatkova 1969, Csúcs 1970, Csúcs 1972, Nasibullin 2002, Agyagási 2004b).

4. Language contacts in the period of the Kazan Khanate

Chronologically, the period of the Golden Horde cannot be sharply separated from the next one called the period of the Kazan Khanate. This is the time when the Kazan Tatar ethnic groups speaking Kipchak Turkic occupied the region and obtained political, demographic, and language dominance. The influence of Kipchak dialects can be found in every language of the area both at lexical and non-lexical levels. A significant number of words of Turkic origin were borrowed by the Votyak, Mari, Mordvin and Chuvash languages (Axmetjanov 1981, 1989, Isanbaev 1978a, 1989), but the Arabic and Persian terminology of the Islam came to these languages also with the mediation of Kazan Tatar (Schermer 1977). Concerning non-lexical effects, Kazan Tatar morphological elements and suffixes of word formation can be detected in the Votyak, Zyrian, Mari (Isanbaev 1978b, Bereczki 1983, 2002, Róna-Tas 1988: 765–66, Rédei 2007) and Chuvash languages (Levitskaja 1976: 162 passim, Agyagási 1995). The comprehensive investigation of Tatar lexical and non-lexical elements in Chuvash, however, is a task of the future. The strong Kazan Tatar influence on the Finno-Ugric languages and Chuvash was continuous after the fall of the Kazan Khanate. However, after the the Volga-Kama Region was annexed by the Russian Empire new conditions for languages contacts emerged, which can be the topic of further research.

5. Summary

After the detailed overview of language contact in the Middle Volga region it can be concluded that the participant languages of the region constituted a linguistic area from the foundation of the Volga Bulgarian state until Russian became the dominant language. The contact-induced linguistic phenomena presented above demonstrate that this linguistic area cannot be described on the basis of using only one classification criterion of linguistic areas. For determining the type of this area the simultaneous application Thomason and Kaufman's principles as well as Campbell's and Muysken's models appears to be useful.

This historical area has three periods of its evolution. The Bulgarian period saw a Volga Bulgarian language dominance with bilateral lexical borrowings. In the age of the Golden Horde the languages of the area were not subordinated to a dominant language. In this period some of the minor ethnic entities underwent language shift, while others functioned according to the maintance and borrowing scenario. The direction of the linguistic interaction between them was mostly bilateral. The last historical period of the Volga-Kama linguistic area was marked by Kazan Tatar dominance, but among the non-dominant languages of the area the maintance and borrowing scenario also had an important role. At the same time there appeared some substratum elements in the new language of the ethnic groups that had undergone an earlier language shift.

Table 1. Language contacts in the Middle Volga-Kama Region: Pre-Bulgarian period

Lexical borrowings	Non-lexical copies
Proto Permian → Proto-Mari	–

Table 2. Language contacts in the Middle Volga-Kama Region: Bulgarian period

Lexical borrowings	Non-lexical copies
Volga Bulgarian → Proto-Permian and Votyak	Volga Bulgarian → Proto-Permian and Votyak
Proto-Permian and Votyak → Volga Bulgarian	Proto-Permian and Votyak → Volga Bulgarian
Volga Bulgarian → Mordvinian	
Volga Bulgarian → East Slavic	
East Slavic → Volga Bulgarian	
Arabic and New Persian → Volga Bulgarian	

Table 3. Language contacts in the period of the Golden Horde

Lexical copies	Calques	Non-lexical copies	Language shift
Volga Bulgarian → Votyak			Volga Bulgarian I Dialect → Votyak, Mari and Chuvash
Volga Bulgarian → Mari	Volga Bulgarian → Mari	Volga Bulgarian → Proto-Mari	VB II Dialect → Middle Kipchak (Central dialect)
„Lower Cheremis” → Mari		Proto-Mari → Middle Chuvash	Volga Hungarian → Chuvash, Tatar, Mordvinian, Russian
„Lower Cheremis” → Middle Chuvash		Middle Chuvash → Mountain Cheremis	„Lower Cheremis” → Mari
Volga Bulgarian → Mordvinian		Middle Chuvash → Middle Kipchak	„Lower Cheremis” → Middle Chuvash
Middle Mongolian → Middle Chuvash			Mordvinian → Kazan Tatar (Mordva- Karatay)
Middle Mongolian → Middle Kipchak			Middle Kipchak → Votyak (Besermen)
Middle Kipchak → Middle Chuvash			
Middle Kipchak → Votyak			
Middle Kipchak → Mari			
Middle Kipchak → Mordvinian			
Old/Middle Russian → Middle Chuvash			
Old/Middle Russian → Middle Kipchak			
Middle Kipchak → Old Russian			
Old/Middle Russian → Mordvinian			
Old/Middle Russian → Votyak			

Table 4. Language contacts in the period of the Kazan Khanate

Lexical copies	Non-lexical copies	Substratum effects
Kazan Tatar → Votyak	Kazan Tatar → Votyak	Volga-Bulgarian → Middle Kipchak dial.
Kazan Tatar → Mari	Kazan Tatar – Zyrian	„Lower Cheremis” → Middle Chuvash
Kazan Tatar → Mordvinian	Kazan Tatar → Mari	Middle Kipchak → Votyak (Besermen)
Kazan Tatar → Chuvash	Kazan Tatar → Chuvash	
Chuvash → Mari		
Mari dial. → Chuvash		
Mari dial. → Kazan Tatar		
Middle Russian → Kazan Tatar		
Middle Russian → Middle Bashkirian		
Middle Russian → Mari		

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